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ABSTRACT

This document examines adult and community learning (ACL) and quality programs across England. The difficulties faced by local education agencies' ACL services in delivering quality are noted, along with ways quality improvement has been supported. Quality programs--whether internal or external, based on awards, or used as diagnostic tools--are deemed important in securing consistent quality for learner experience, teaching and support, first-rung or Widening Participation programs, resources, equality and diversity, achievement, and leadership and management. The focus, characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of the following quality programs are detailed: the Excellence Model; Investors in People; ISO 9000; the Charter Mark; the Guidance Council Matrix; the Basic Skills Quality Matrix; PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance for Small Organisations); Learning PROBE (Promoting Business Excellence); and internal quality frameworks. The following are among 22 prerequisites, tactics, and strategies for successful application of quality programs: (1) make formal quality improvement an integral activity rather than an "add-on" activity; (2) form and develop a strong and committed implementation team; (3) develop and sustain two-way communication; and (4) link the chosen improvement strategy to the concept of a learning organization. Five case studies are included. An audit tool is appended. (Contains 12 figures, 25 references, and 14 web site resources.)(MN)

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adult and community learning
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The Adult and Community Learning Quality Support Programme is a 3-year programme to support ACL providers to meet quality requirements of inspection and funding agencies and improve their provision. It is run by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) in partnership with the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) and is funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Details of the programme, extra copies of this guide and back-up materials are available on the website www.qualityACL.org.uk

These guides are currently available:

- Self-assessment and development planning for ACL providers
- Observation of teaching and learning in adult education
- Listening to learners
- Fit for purpose: self-assessment for small providers
- Equality and diversity in ACL: a guide for managers
- Involving tutors and support staff in the ACL quality agenda.

Further guides and workshops are planned on:

- learning in progress: recognising achievement in ACL
- curriculum leadership in ACL
- making sense and use of management information systems
- leadership and management in ACL
- staff development for quality.

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Glossary

ACL Adult and community learning

ALI Adult Learning Inspectorate

ALP Adult Learning Plan

BSI British Standards Institute

CIF Common Inspection Framework

DDA Disability Discrimination Act

DETR Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

DfES Department for Education and Skills

DP Development Plan

EFQM European Foundation for Quality Management

EO Equal opportunities

ESF European Social Fund

GAB Guidance Accreditation Board

FE Further education

FENTO Further Education National Training Organisation

HE Higher education

ICT Information and communication technology

IiP Investors in People

LEA Local education authority

LSC Learning and Skills Council

OFSTED Office for Standards in Education

PQASSO Practical Quality Assurance for Small Organisations

PROBE Promoting Business Excellence

QA Quality assurance

QI Quality improvement

SAR Self-assessment report

SENDA Special Educational Needs and Disability Act

SLA Service level agreement

SMART targets Specific, measurable, achievable, results-orientated, time-bound targets

SRB Single Regeneration Bid

TEC Training and Enterprise Council

TQM Total quality management

VCO Voluntary and community organisation

Terminology

In this publication, '**quality schemes**' is used as an umbrella term encompassing:

- **quality models**, such as the Excellence Model (which can also be used as a quality tool)
- **quality frameworks**, such as the Common Inspection Framework and internal service frameworks
- **awards**, such as Charter Mark and Investors in People
- **service standards**, such as the Guidance Council Matrix
- **quality systems**, such as PQASSO
- **quality tools**, such as Learning PROBE.

In general, the use of quality schemes leads to quality improvement and the achievement of quality awards and standards establishes quality assurance, usually through a prior process of quality improvement.

Introduction

The challenges to ACL

Local education authority (LEA) adult and community learning (ACL) services face stiff challenges. There are difficulties in planning and ensuring consistent quality in services delivered by different providers for a wide range of students, often across large geographical areas. The sheer diversity of the services across England, with many different delivery models, is pronounced.

Merton's review of Adult Learning Plans (2001) showed the key characteristics of the sector to be:

- multi-site delivery
- varied modes of delivery
- a part-time workforce
- lack of investment in infrastructure
- a range of funding sources accessed.

The quality agenda

Quality has moved centre stage and has become a major focus for providers, for their staff, partners and volunteers and for their 'customers' – the learners. Raising the quality of provision and the standards achieved by learners is a key government policy objective and a central concern for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which plans and purchases post-compulsory learning opportunities.

The ACL sector has already made considerable progress in improving the quality of its work since the Learning and Skills Act 2000 was passed.

- In terms of *quality control*, or checking and monitoring quality, the sector is improving its practice by sampling and monitoring its provision, for example through its systems of observing teaching and learning.
- It has developed its capacity in the related realm of *quality assurance* – maintaining and ensuring the quality of what it does.
- It has embraced the imperative of *quality improvement* – not just monitoring and maintaining the quality of what it does, but looking for ways to enhance it.

These themes recur (and often overlap) throughout this publication, but the chief emphasis is on *quality improvement*.

The rest of this introduction examines how the sector has been addressing the quality agenda and how it has been supported in the process.

Self-assessment reports and development planning

The new quality regime requires LEAs, along with other providers in the non-HE post-16 learning and skills sector, to produce comprehensive self-assessment reports (SARs) based on the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) developed by the Office for Standards in Education/Adult Learning Inspectorate (OFSTED/ALI).

Kenway and Reisenberger (2001) and Ravenhall, Merrifield and Gardener (2002) provide comprehensive guidance for the sector and its partners on self-assessment and development plans, as well as background on the context in which these processes operate. The LSC (2001) provides additional guidance.

The ACL sector has responded well to the demands of the new quality regime, producing its first SARs by 31 March 2002.

Performance review

LEAs are working with Local LSCs on performance reviews designed to monitor organisations and enable them to progress with their development plans. See Ravenhall, Ogilvie and Ewens (2002, pp5–14) for the policy context.

Inspection and performance review are distinguished by the LSC:

The Council's performance review is a continuous process, based on information from a variety of sources. Much of the information is collected through regular contact between the Council and those it funds as part of routine monitoring and support activities. Inspection is a separate, highly-focused process undertaken ... on a four yearly cycle. Performance Review is intended to help ... providers devise and implement strategies to achieve consistently high standards of performance and quality. Inspection provides external validation of performance against a common inspection framework at a given point in time.

LSC 2002, p3

Other quality issues

Observation of teaching and learning

Observation of teaching and learning in the ACL sector has not always been systematic, comprehensive or consistent throughout all LEAs. It has often occurred only in the context of teacher training or individual staff development and has not usually been formally graded. It may have been taking place in some areas of LEA provision but not in others.

Many providers and their partners recognised these issues in the course of the self-assessment process. They acknowledged that if the new regime put the learners at the heart of everything, then observation systems to check and improve quality were vital. Evidence of systems in operation became essential for SARs.

Ewens (2001) offers guidance on developing, implementing or improving systems. The Oxfordshire County Council case study in the 'Case studies' chapter shows how special standards have been developed to improve teaching and learning in that locality.

Listening to learners

Recognising also that the key to quality is learner satisfaction and achievement (however this is measured), many LEA ACL providers have refined their systems for listening to learners – former, current or potential learners, as well as 'stakeholders' and other interested parties. This process is linked strongly to the Widening Participation agenda.

Ravenhall (2001) gives comprehensive guidance on how this process can be implemented or improved. The ALI inspectors in the pilot inspections not only observed over 600 classes but spent considerable time talking and listening to individuals and groups of learners.

TQM

Another important thrust of the new quality regime is involving all staff in improving provision throughout an organisation. It has been recognised in recent years that successful organisations involve and empower their employees. This is difficult for many LEA ACL providers and their partners, because of the dispersed nature of their workforce, but ALI inspectors have shown much interest in the awareness of tutors and support staff in issues beyond their immediate contacts with learners.

Ravenhall, Ogilvie and Ewens (2002) show how staff are involved in the ACL sector and how their involvement and empowerment can be increased. They outline (pp15–24) the usefulness of a 'total quality management' (TQM) approach, the emphasis of which is on meeting stated needs and standards and preventing poor work. This approach is everyone's responsibility within a team framework, and its central thrust is addressing the agenda of customers.

In an ACL context, TQM involves values, leadership, teams, structures and processes being directed to the needs of adult learners.

Equality and diversity and quality

Traditionally, securing opportunities for all learners has been a significant strength of ACL, and to an extent this has been confirmed by the findings of the ALI pilot inspections.

Reisenberger and Dadzie (2002) set out legislative and reporting requirements for LEA ACL in terms of race and disability, explaining the developing policy context and the importance of 'embedding' and 'mainstreaming' equality and diversity practice. The LSC provides guidance on its website (www.lsc.gov.uk) about recent changes in legislation.

LEA ACL has responded well in the past to the equality and diversity agenda and, because of its expertise and tradition in this area, has also responded well to new developments, particularly the challenges of 'embedding' and 'mainstreaming' practice. There is anxiety in the sector about the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) (now Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995) and how this may affect some outreach provision. This is being addressed, and the DfES (May 2002) has published guidance for adult education providers.

ALI pilot inspections of ACL

Although the first full programme of inspections of LEA ACL will not start until October 2002, the ALI has already considerably influenced quality improvement through its draft guidance on the Common Inspection Framework (CIF). Ten pilot inspections were undertaken in late 2001 to early 2002. The findings have been disseminated at conferences, workshops and other events nationwide.

Together with SARs and other quality requirements, the pilots provide a clear frame of reference against which the quality of provision may be evaluated.

Criteria for grades have not been provided, since it is considered that grading is a matter of judgement, of weighing up strengths and weaknesses and their relative importance for learning and learners. Judging quality is a more complex process than working through a checklist.

The pilots concentrated on provision secured through six LEAs, an institution maintained by an LEA, a specialist institution, a community group and a voluntary organisation. While the resulting feedback, reports and grades remain confidential to the providers, ALI has sought to disseminate its overall interim findings. Interestingly, inspectors have avoided using the terms 'strengths' and 'weaknesses', referring instead to 'emerging issues' – both positive and negative.

Paragraphs 40 to 50 of the *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector 2001–02* (ALI 2002) summarise the results.

What can you do?

Consider how far the issues emerging in the pilots match the strengths and weaknesses you have identified in your own SARs. Whether they match or not, carry on with your improvement strategies through your development plans and, in particular, check that your evidence base is sound.

Review your quality assurance processes to ensure that they reflect the central CIF focus on the progress and achievement of individual learners and the extent to which all aspects of provision and overarching leadership and management processes are designed and operated to maximise this.

To help you take stock of your quality control, assurance and improvement position, an audit tool is provided in the Appendix. This incorporates key LSC self-assessment and development planning requirements, CIF quality indicators, and key messages from pilot inspections and other sources, including themes from previous publications in this series.

Quality schemes

Relevance to ACL

Quality schemes – whether internal or external, based on awards or used as diagnostic tools – are important because they can secure consistent quality for:

- learner experience
- teaching and support
- first-rung or Widening Participation programmes
- resources
- equality and diversity
- achievement
- leadership and management.

Above all, all parts of a service – from front desk to teaching and learning area – will be working together.

The CIF, with its emphasis on keeping the interests of the learner at the heart of the process, has proved a powerful template for enabling LEA ACL providers to evaluate their services and provide a springboard for improvement. For some LEA ACL services, complying with the minimum requirements of their Local LSCs and producing an annual self-assessment report and development plan may be the limit of their current capacity. They may also have achieved standards such as Investors in People (IiP) as a separate service or as part of a local authority-wide process. For other services on top of the quality agenda, it may be that the CIF, performance review and other parts of the current quality assurance and improvement regime are not sufficient in themselves to deliver all the possible progress that might at this stage be considered feasible.

All the case studies in this publication (see the 'Case studies' chapter) feature ACL services that have exceeded the minimum requirement.

In particular, ACL services need to consider how to meet the requirements of the government's 'Best Value' agenda, established by the *Modernising government* White Paper (Cabinet Office 1999) and referred to in question 7 of the CIF. (See the Hounslow example in the 'Case studies' chapter, and also Reisenberger and Dadzie [2002 p32].)

In addition, for those LEAs that secure provision by contracts with FE colleges or voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) or a mixture of 'direct' and 'contracted out' provision, there is the issue of how to demonstrate 'added value' to that provision. They must show why it is better for colleges and VCOs to deliver ACL through LEAs rather than directly funded by the Local LSC and what the advantages are of current arrangements.

Characteristics

There is a profusion of quality schemes, with more specialised and detailed purposes and specifications, that can support the CIF in improving the quality of LEA ACL provision – see also Ravenhall (2001, pp49–50).

This publication focuses on:

- the Excellence Model
- Investors in People
- ISO 9000
- the Charter Mark
- the Guidance Council Matrix
- the Basic Skills Quality Mark
- PQASSO
- Learning PROBE
- internal quality frameworks.

Figure 1 briefly describes the characteristics of each of these models.

Figure 1 Characteristics of quality schemes

Scheme	Focus	Characteristics
Excellence Model	Strategic overview	Asks questions (many other schemes provide standards). Like CIF, looks at quality in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Different variants. Possible to achieve European, UK or regional awards based on assessment against the model
Investors in People	People / employees in an organisation and their role in improving its performance	Based on principles of commitment, planning, action and evaluation. Involves various stages, from information gathering, independent initial assessment, developing people, to assessment and re-assessment
ISO 9000 and 'family' (ISO 9000, 2000, etc)	Processes	Identifies processes and their application, determining how they interact and will be managed, providing correct resources, monitoring and improving – then independent assessment
Charter Mark	Customers, service users	Based on clear standards, openness and communication, consultation, availability of service, equal treatment, quick attention to and resolution of complaints, effective resourcing, and orientation to improvement and user satisfaction. Submission of application, then independent assessment

Figure 1 continued

Scheme	Focus	Characteristics
Guidance Council Matrix service standards	Information, advice and guidance services	Comprises five areas of service delivery and five areas of service management, from people's awareness of the service to continuous improvement through monitoring and action. Accreditation through Guidance Accreditation Board
Basic Skills Quality Mark for post-16 programmes	Basic skills	10 elements, ranging from a strategy and action plan and individual negotiated learning plans to an effective procedure for monitoring action plan and assessing improvement
PQASSO	Whole organisation system for VCOs and small businesses	12 'areas': planning for quality; governance; management; user-centred service; staffing and volunteers; training and development; managing money; managing resources; managing activities; networking and partnership; monitoring and evaluation; results
Learning PROBE (Promoting Business Excellence)	Processes	Based on the Excellence Model – not a standard, but a way of examining the effectiveness of an organisation and its processes via group selection, questionnaire, facilitated meetings and consultancy support leading to written summary

The development of the equality and diversity framework referred to by Reisenberger and Dadzie (2002, p33) looks to embed and mainstream racial equality measures in organisations. Where equal opportunities practice in general quality schemes is currently only implicitly addressed, these schemes may need adjustment to bring them in line with developing equality and diversity practice.

The Excellence Model and other quality schemes

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model consists of nine criteria, divided into 'enablers' and 'results'.

- Enablers are about how the organisation conducts itself, how it managers its staff and resources, how it plans its strategy and how it reviews and monitors key processes.
- Results are to do with what the organisation achieves, including the level of satisfaction among employees and customers, its impact on the wider community and key performance indicators.

Some schemes, like the CIF itself, PQASSO, Learning PROBE and some internal quality frameworks like that of the Hounslow service (see the 'Case studies' chapter), are similarly comprehensive, as Figure 2 indicates. Others have a more specialised focus – for example, the Charter Mark focuses on customers and Investors in People on employees.

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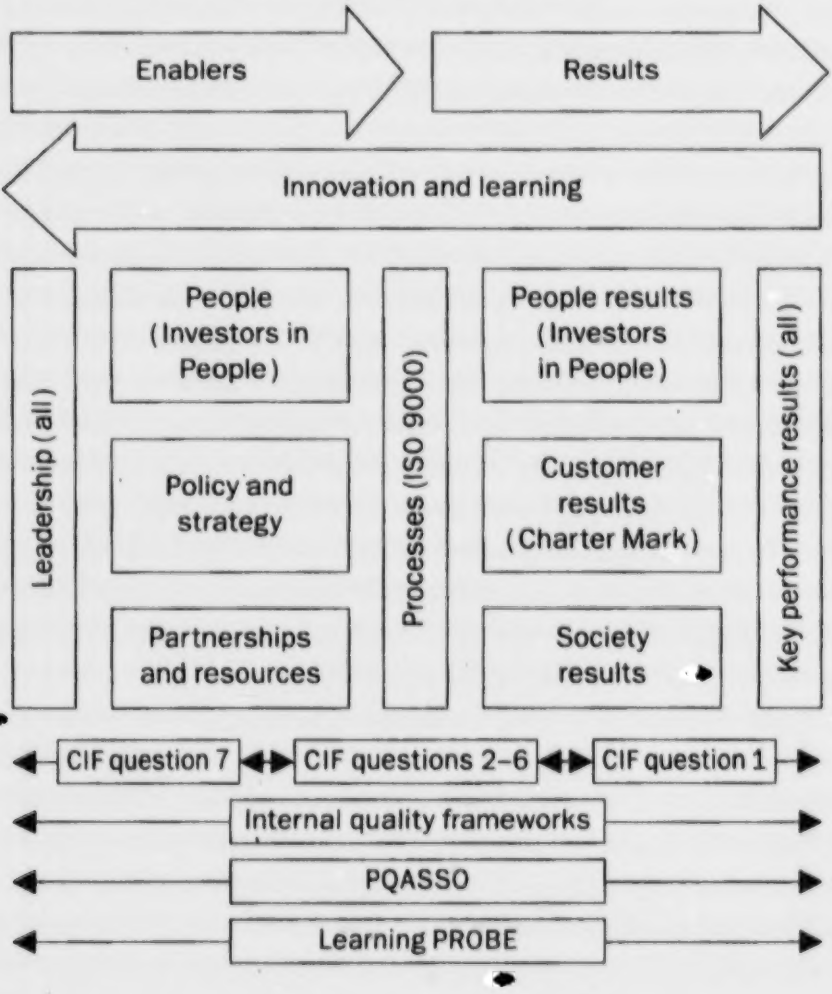
Figure 2 shows how all the other tools and models relate to the 'enablers' and 'results' of the Excellence Model.

Figure 2 The Excellence Model and other quality schemes



Adapted from British Quality Foundation 2001

Advantages of quality schemes

Consistency of quality

Consistency of quality may be achieved throughout a service so that good practice does not simply appear in pockets – in certain geographical locations or in some partner organisations but not others. This is particularly important to ACL, as it is largely a part-time and geographically dispersed service with particular management challenges. The issue of consistency recurs in all the case studies (see the 'Case studies' chapter).

Meeting the 'Best Value' agenda

Best Value 'is defined as a duty to deliver services to clear standards (covering both cost and quality) by the most economic, efficient and effective means available' (DETR 2000, p7).

DETR (2000, p3) stresses that: 'Quality schemes will not in themselves guarantee Best Value. However, if used properly they can provide considerable help in achieving Best Value...'. This point is emphasised throughout the DETR publication.

The Hounslow case study (see the 'Case studies' chapter) refers to developing a quality framework as a response to Best Value.

In-depth analysis and action

The CIF, giving only the briefest of indications of good practice in certain areas, acts as a more general overview. For example, there is only oblique reference in CIF question 7 to consultation with customers: 'the quality assurance arrangements are systematic and informed by the views of all interested parties' (ALI/OFSTED 2001, p13). See Ravenhall (2001) for more on this theme.

Other quality schemes with different focuses provide more in-depth analysis and action, putting parts of a service under a magnifying glass, as it were. For example (see also the 'Case studies' chapter):

- the Charter Mark standard guarantees putting learners at the heart of the system in the most effective and thorough way possible, as the Richmond Adult Community College case study clearly demonstrates
- PQASSO, which has a section 'User-Centred Service', could achieve the same purpose for VCOs working in partnership with LEA ACL providers; using PQASSO does not preclude applying for a Charter Mark
- the Hounslow quality framework is a comprehensive package that covers the CIF in great detail
- the West Berkshire Adult Education Information Service addresses in detail the information aspects alluded to relatively briefly in the CIF.

Developing a unique selling point

An organisation can develop a unique selling point through a quality scheme – being able to claim a particular level of service and to have national recognition may increase its appeal to customers (learners), the community and other 'stakeholders', including the Local LSC. This can cement partnerships, by offering 'added value', providing good reasons for the LEA, its partners and the Local LSC to carry on with relationships and agreements that work well and are characterised by high standards.

General benefits of quality schemes

Other reasons for working towards and achieving any quality standards accreditation are well demonstrated by the Guidance Council (2000). What applies to working towards Guidance Council Matrix standards and achieving accreditation applies in general to other quality standards.

Benefits include:

- skills acquisition for employees – for example, in written presentation, reflection and review
- teamwork
- staff development opportunities as gaps in skills are identified
- confidence – the 'shot in the arm' when people realise that they are already doing many things well
- review of current practice and a 'continuous improvement mentality'
- improved systems, sometimes through improved documentation
- network support, inside and outside organisations
- the experience of an enhanced sense of professionalism within organisations
- funding advantages – the likelihood, and in some cases the certainty, that organisations would enhance their future prospects of local or national funding from funding bodies such as the LSCs
- recognition and positive publicity – organisations with accreditation are recognised as delivering a quality service by their customers – former, present and future – their partners and other agencies.

Adapted from Guidance Council 2000

Benefits of specific quality schemes

- Identification of strengths and areas for improvement, and priority areas to address – Excellence Model.
- Providing a comprehensive framework to make sense of all quality improvement activities – Excellence Model.
- Enabling comparison and benchmarking with a wide range of other organisations – Excellence Model and Charter Mark.
- Free audit – expert feedback from assessors (see the Richmond Adult Community College case study in the 'Case studies' chapter) – Charter Mark.
- Better business performance (see the Redbridge Institute of Adult Education case study in the 'Case studies' chapter) – Investors in People.
- Reduced employee turnover – Investors in People.
- More focused training and development opportunities – Investors in People.
- More opportunities for individuals to innovate and greater job satisfaction – Investors in People.
- Better use of time and resources – ISO 9000.
- Improved consistency of service leading to increased customer satisfaction – ISO 9000.
- Improved and transparent internal and external communication – ISO 9000.

Adapted from Cabinet Office 2001

Disadvantages of quality schemes

However, neither the government nor the agencies responsible for the various quality schemes mention the possible disadvantages of working towards or achieving accreditation in a climate of optimism and often undiluted positive messages. If you believe that a particular quality scheme will be beneficial to your organisation, you must be realistic about the implications of using it.

Lack of 'fitness for purpose'

The CIF provides the principal set of indicators or evaluative statements against which LEA ACL services measure themselves. Other quality schemes may cause a service to examine CIF criteria in more detail and therefore enhance quality in those areas. However, such schemes may ask questions or make demands that actually take attention away from the learner and create a different emphasis.

Potential for confusion

As Stanton (2001, p45) notes in the context of colleges, there is potential for confusion between causes, symptoms and solutions. For example, an LEA ACL provider could decide to go for the Charter Mark as the wrong solution to a problem because it has not linked symptoms to causes analytically.

Organisational complexity

LEA ACL services may have few full-time staff and large numbers of part-time staff, with those responsible for quality managing with minimum resources. In addition, services can operate over a large geographical area, with all the challenges that this poses, unlike schools or colleges operating on a limited number of sites. Is it feasible or worthwhile to undertake an intense and complicated accreditation process in addition to necessary self-assessment processes? Is the investment of time and resources worth the added benefits? The Richmond Adult Community College example (see the 'Case studies' chapter) would imply that the answer is 'yes', although the whole institution was put under strain.

Poor timing

Poor timing is related to other factors, such as innovation fatigue. A standard or accreditation should only be pursued at a time when the organisation is able to cope with the challenges.

Strategic tensions and confusion

LEA ACL services do not operate in isolation. Local authorities work to strategic plans and the pursuit of separate quality initiatives may not fit in with the particular priorities of the main organisation.

The 'facade phenomenon' and initiative fatigue

Quality schemes are intended to encourage and embed improvement and innovation, with everyone being involved and 'owning' the process and the product. Real change, particularly in staff attitudes, is not likely to be achieved solely through working towards accreditation, for example. Results can be superficial, bringing about the 'facade phenomenon' – where cosmetic differences mask the fact that little has really changed. Employees may be either unaware or uninterested in organisational initiatives if they have not been 'brought on board' in the quality improvement process.

Failure to make an impact

In many instances the benefits of a particular quality scheme are extolled but it is difficult to see what improvements have been made that would not have come about anyway through sound quality management practices. The question to ask is whether quality tools 'add value' to the self-assessment process using the CIF, which is, after all, geared to putting learners first.

Disruption to partnerships

LEA ACL services that secure provision wholly or partly by contract often have delicate relationships with their partners. Extra work in applying additional quality tools could put partnerships under exceptional strain, not 'adding value' to the partnership. This could lead to fragmentation and 'divorce', with partners seeking direct LSC funding.

High cost

Cost could be a significant factor. The Excellence Model can be used for basic diagnostic assessment or for more thorough assessment – most organisations spend less than £5000. The Investors in People award carries a direct assessment cost of about £550 per day – a dispersed LEA ACL provider could well need 10 assessment days. Similar costs would apply to ISO 9000.

Applying quality schemes to LEA ACL services

This chapter looks at how weaknesses – or 'areas for improvement' – identified in a notional self-assessment report might lead to the application of a particular quality scheme.

The Excellence Model, Guidance Council Matrix and PQASSO are used as examples, but other quality schemes would be equally suitable. An explanation of each scheme is given to justify its choice and, in the case of Matrix and PQASSO, how its main components relate to specific parts of the CIF or to the CIF in general. In each of the examples, it is assumed that proper analysis beforehand has linked causes, symptoms and solutions.

The rest of the chapter looks briefly at other models and tools.

The Excellence Model

Notional weakness

The service lacks a strong strategic focus, the effects of which have permeated whole-service delivery and do not put the learner at the heart of everything.

The Excellence Model would be a good quality tool to use for this weakness because of its whole-organisation focus, and its emphasis on quality improvement. It would help the organisation assess its strengths and areas for improvement across all its activities.

The Model consists of nine criteria, divided into 'enablers' (the 'hows') and 'results' (the 'whats') (see Figure 2 on p12). The starting point is to gather evidence relevant to the criteria – in a simple, diagnostic way or through a complex, validated, evidence-based report. The resulting self-assessment leads to a profile of an organisation's strengths and areas for improvement, leading to a prioritised improvement action plan. This can involve other specialised quality schemes.

At the heart of the Model is RADAR logic – Results, Approach, Deployment and Assessment and Review (British Quality Foundation 2001) – a way of working backwards from the desired outcome. The idea is to start by determining the results being aimed for ('Where do we want to be?'), adopt approaches to achieve the results ('How are we going to get there?') and deploy the approaches ('How do we implement the approaches adopted?'). The final part is to assess and review the approaches used and analyse the results achieved ('Have we arrived where we wanted to go?') and improve continuously from there.

The Excellence Model is a supporting tool in the pursuit of Best Value. DETR (2000, pp13–14) indicates that the model 'often forces people to think about issues they had not considered before, or to approach issues in new ways. As a result of this questioning process, which lies at the heart of self-assessment against the Excellence Model, it is possible to form a very fresh, detailed and informative picture of an organisation's strengths and areas for improvement.'

Figure 3 Notional timetable for using the Excellence Model

Action	Rewrite the strategic plan using Excellence Model as a diagnostic tool
Outcome/target	Complete a new strategic plan by February 2003
Timescale/milestones	February 2003
Person responsible	Head of community learning service
Monitoring/evaluation	Monthly reporting to director of education and staff through meetings and newsletter
Progress/completion	Revised action plan following monthly meetings using Excellence Model
Success criteria	By September 2003 a revamped service implementing specifically identified parts of the strategic plan. By September 2004, the strategic plan fully implemented

Guidance Council Matrix standards (2002)

Notional weakness

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) are inconsistent across the service, with excellent practice in some locations but poor or barely existent practice in others.

One way of addressing the weakness identified would be to 'transplant' good practice to the weaker areas using Guidance Council Matrix standards. However, it would be more effective, if more challenging, to get Matrix accreditation for the whole service.

In contrast to the Excellence Model as a quality tool, Matrix standards are service standards. The Matrix process would motivate everyone involved, while not appearing as a threat to staff whose area has not been performing well.

The process of achieving accreditation is about quality improvement. Once accreditation is gained, quality assurance is established, and monitoring the systems is a quality control process. West Berkshire Council Adult Education Information Service, for example, has addressed both improvement and assurance in achieving accreditation (see the 'Case studies' chapter).

Figure 4 shows how accreditation can be achieved.

Figure 4 Notional timetable for gaining Guidance Council Matrix accreditation

Action	Achieve Guidance Council Matrix accreditation to improve the IAG part of the service
Outcome/target	Full accreditation will be achieved
Timescale/milestones	December 2002
Person/people responsible	Area curriculum leaders in advice and guidance, service quality manager, head of community learning service
Monitoring/evaluation	Monthly meetings with actions signed off by head of service
Progress/completion	Action plan reviewed and revised monthly
Success criteria	High grade at next ALI inspection; 90% user satisfaction; comprehensive evidence of learner records and progression (if appropriate)

The Matrix standards match significant parts of the CIF, but do not address some of the on-programme concerns of the CIF or the issue of 'relevant, effective support on personal issues' (ALI/OFSTED 2001, p12).

Figure 5 shows the relationship between the Matrix and the CIF.

Figure 5 Guidance Council Matrix standards and the CIF

Direct relevance of Matrix standards	**CIF criteria (relevant extracts)**
All 10 matrix elements	*Question 6*
Delivery of the service elements:	How well are learners guided and supported?
■ People are made aware of and engage with the service	Evaluate:
■ People understand the nature of the service	■ The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance to learners in relation to courses and programmes and career progression
■ People's use of the service is agreed	Consider the extent to which:
■ People are provided with access to information	■ Support arrangements are planned and managed coherently
■ People are supported in exploring options and making choices	
Management of the service elements:	
■ Service delivery is planned and maintained	
■ Facilities and resources are sufficient to deliver the service	
■ Staff competence and the support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service	
■ Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained	
■ Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring and action	

CIF (ALI/OFSTED 2001) and Matrix standards (Guidance Council 2002)

PQASSO (2000)

Notional area for improvement

Where voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) working with the LEA ACL service have implemented the PQASSO quality system, the contributions of these organisations to self-assessment and the quality of their provision have been good and need to be extended to all 'subcontracted' organisations.

Because PQASSO is comprehensive, it is the obvious quality system for VCOs and in some areas there is a good match with the CIF. Each has the service users at its heart ('learners' for the CIF, 'users' for PQASSO). PQASSO has three levels, and if a VCO in partnership with an LEA ACL service achieves the PQASSO standard at any level, it will be in an excellent position to respond to the quality assurance and self-assessment requirements of the LEA, since relevant systems and evidence will already be in place.

Figure 6 shows how an LEA ACL service contracting out its provision can enable its partners to achieve PQASSO accreditation.

Figure 6 Notional timetable for implementing PQASSO

Action	**1** Include in service-level agreements (SLAs) the requirement that PQASSO must be used at the appropriate level by VCOs which do not currently do so **2** Assist VCOs in using the system
Outcome/target	VCOs in partnership with the LEA ACL service will achieve the appropriate level of PQASSO
Timescale/milestones	April 2003
Person/people responsible	ACL quality manager and VCO managers
Monitoring/evaluation	Steering committee of head of ACL services (LEA) and trustees from each VCO
Progress/completion	Monthly meetings with actions signed off
Success criteria	An overall high-quality SAR for the LEA ACL service delivering high-quality learning over the whole service and all its partners

Figure 7 is a snapshot of some of the matches between PQASSO and the CIF.

Figure 7 PQASSO and the CIF

PQASSO standards (relevant extracts)	**CIF criteria (relevant extracts)**
Planning for quality	*Question 7* How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?
The organisation's QA system is fully established and leads to significant measurable improvements	Evaluate: How effectively, through quality assurance and self-assessment, performance is monitored and evaluated and steps taken to secure improvement
User-centred service There is a comprehensive policy and plan for user involvement User feedback is used to anticipate and plan future service delivery There is a regular flow of comments and suggestions from users	*No explicit mention of learner feedback in CIF but implicitly required throughout*

Figure 7 continued

PQASSO standards (relevant extracts)	**CIF criteria (relevant extracts)**
Training and development	*Question 2* How effective are teaching, training and learning? Consider the extent to which teachers and trainers:
Individuals have their own training and development plans	■ Show knowledge, technical competence and up-to-date expertise, at a level consistent with effective teaching, training and assessment of the course or programme
Managing resources	*Question 3* How are achievement and learning affected by resources?
Staff are fully trained to use resources and technologies	Evaluate: ■ The adequacy and suitability of staff Consider the extent to which: ■ The professional development of staff contributes to their effectiveness
The use of resources is monitored and leads to planned improvements	■ Specialist equipment and materials are used, including facilities which are relevant to the workplace and which meet current industrial standards
Networking and partnership The organisation regularly has joint events with other agencies All joint initiatives and partnerships are evaluated	*No explicit mention of partnership except in relation to advice and guidance in question 6, but implicitly required to work in the interests of learners where they exist*

Figure 7 continued

PQASSO standards (relevant extracts)	**CIF criteria (relevant extracts)**
Monitoring and evaluation Information on all key areas of activity has been systematically collected, analysed and used over a period of at least one year	Whole of CIF through self-assessment report and development plan
Results A comprehensive range of output and outcome targets has been achieved over two years Trend data shows key activities are improving The organisation performs well in comparison with other organisations with similar activities	*Question 1* How well do learners achieve? Evaluate: ▪ Success in achieving challenging targets, including qualifications and learning goals, and trends over time *Question 7* How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? Consider the extent to which: ▪ Demanding targets for retention, achievement, progression and employment are set and met

PQASSO (Charities Evaluation Services 2000) and *CIF* (ALI/OFSTED 2001)

Learning PROBE

Learning PROBE, developed from the Promoting Business Excellence tool, is a dedicated diagnostic benchmarking tool managed within the Raising Quality and Achievement Programme at the LSDA. Its emphasis is on quality improvement. It gives an organisation a snapshot of its current state in terms of:

- leadership
- service processes
- people
- performance management
- results.

PROBE consists of six steps:

- selecting a team from individuals across the organisation and at different levels
- the team leader communicating to team members pre-exercise
- distributing and completing a questionnaire
- meeting for half a day to reach a team consensus score from individual questionnaire scores (if possible)
- a facilitated day leading to a summary report by the facilitator
- an action planning day for working through the key issues.

Learning PROBE can be used following a self-assessment process, but can also be initiated in other circumstances.

Internal quality standards

Some LEA ACL providers have set up their own quality frameworks and accompanying quality handbooks that encompass quality control, assurance and improvement. Such providers recognise that their services are unique and that national frameworks are not necessarily suitable for all their purposes. Internal frameworks are often based on models such as Total Quality Management, with an emphasis on values, leadership, teams, processes and structures designed to have a favourable impact on customers or learners. Ravenhall, Ogilvie and Ewens (2002) explain this model in detail (pp15–24) and provide an outline quality manual (p31).

The advantage of an internal framework is that it can be designed to meet the unique needs of a service, but can also be adapted to meet changing external requirements. Also, course review – a key part of any internal framework – is not addressed by any general quality scheme.

Two case studies of internal frameworks are included in the 'Case studies' chapter: from Hounslow Adult and Community Education Service and from Oxfordshire County Council Adult and Community Learning Service.

The Hounslow example

Hounslow's internal framework shows responsiveness to external factors and acknowledges how it will constantly evolve as change occurs. In the words of one of its originators:

It was finally published formally in the summer of 2001 but with a major warning that it was not yet perfect and would always be treated as an organic document which would grow and develop particularly in response to the yet to be published LSC guidelines on self-assessment.

Hounslow's quality framework consists of seven sections:

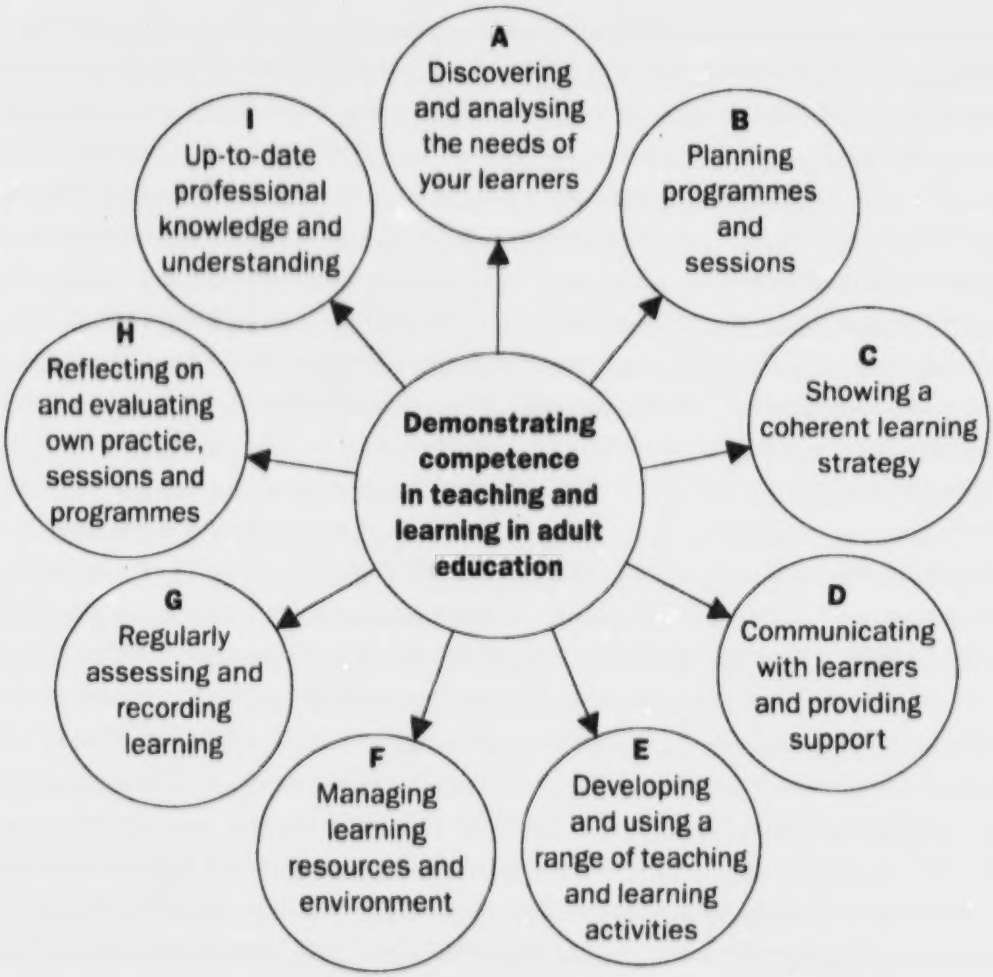
- context
- quality policy
- managing the process
- the self-assessment framework, including:
  - diagrams of the process
  - timetable
  - guidance on undertaking the review
  - borough-wide service indicators
  - benchmarking
  - the scope of the annual review against service standards
  - the method for recording annual self-assessment review
  - service reviews (service-wide, curricular, centre, sports halls and community lettings)
- evidence collected for the framework and methods of collection
- the relationship with the strategic planning process
- instructions and guidelines for individuals and groups.

Quality control, assurance and improvement are all comprehensively addressed in this document, and there is a useful section (5.6) on course review.

The Oxfordshire example

This is a more specialised focus on a hybrid of occupational and service standards to control and improve the standard of teaching and learning throughout the authority. Figure 8 shows the nine standards of competence developed and adapted by the authority.

Figure 8 Oxfordshire County Council standards of competence



Using quality schemes and applying for accreditation

Whatever the quality scheme being used, organisations need to go through formal procedures. Applying for Investors in People accreditation makes different demands from attempting to achieve a Charter Mark award, for example. The Excellence Model can be used as a diagnostic tool, but also as a basis for competition for an excellence award on a regional or other level. Using Learning PROBE is not about achieving accreditation, but about improving an organisation through a diagnostic approach, and of course internally developed schemes do not lead to any accreditation or formal reward.

However, for the process of using a quality scheme to be successful, certain prerequisites, tactics and strategies are useful.

Prerequisites

Owen (2000 pp4–5) outlines four 'vital requirements' that must be in place before starting a benchmarking project:

- strong commitment from senior management to act on the project's findings
- support for the staff taking part in the project, including training and resources
- authorisation for staff
- agreed time away from their normal duties for those staff taking part.

Similarly, in the context of quality schemes:

- it is important that a senior manager champions a project and is committed to it
- undertaking quality improvement work, whatever its nature, is demanding, and may in many cases signal the need for extra training and resources
- staff involved must be empowered to undertake work to do with the project
- formal quality improvement activity should not be a 'bolt-on' activity in addition to everything else.

In most of the case studies undertaken for this publication (see the 'Case studies' chapter), senior management commitment was strong (particularly in Hounslow) and support for staff and their involvement was high (particularly in Redbridge and Richmond). The choice of scheme was generally made at a strategic level. However, one of the originators of the West Berkshire Guidance Council B accreditation project is described as a 'third tier' officer in the authority.

Tactics

One crucial tactic is forming and developing a strong and committed implementation team – from all levels and sectors of the organisation – and encouraging it to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, results-orientated, time-bound) planning, implementation and review targets.

As well as a clear purpose, the team should have well-defined decision-making procedures, appropriate leadership, good interpersonal relations, a good idea of individual members' needs (especially those of less senior members of the organisation) and good relationships with other groups and the organisation in general.

A good team will consist of:

- creative problem-solvers
- researchers
- networkers
- coordinators
- 'team players'
- doers
- implementers
- evaluators.

Good communication is equally important. Sustained two-way communication ensures that staff know what is happening, are involved and can be drawn in.

The Learning PROBE tool is a tactic in itself – a relatively small-scale approach that could lead to far-reaching changes throughout an organisation.

The Redbridge and Richmond case studies (see the 'Case studies' chapter) indicate how effectively such tactics can be used. Both involved staff at all levels, had a team-oriented approach and kept everyone informed.

Strategies

For quality control, quality assurance and/or improvement through quality schemes, it is unlikely, and indeed undesirable, that any strategy other than one linked to the idea of 'the learning organisation' will be suitable – a strategy that involves and empowers participants.

Stanton (2001) extends this point. Applying lessons from the Raising Quality and Achievement Programme, a mechanistic approach to quality improvement could prevent it being embedded in an organisation. Stanton reports (p10) that empowerment can come from involvement, rather than being a prerequisite for it.

There are a number of possible strategies for addressing the quality agenda (adapted from Stanton 2001, pp11–12).

- It requires a holistic rather than a piecemeal approach (though in some cases 'incremental' changes can be spread very successfully).
- Organisations need strategies for improvement, not just tactics.
- Staff must recognise the need for, and possibility of, improvement.
- Targets must be demanding but feasible.
- Tactics should be selected for their 'fitness for purpose', looking at the nature of the problem and the institutional context.
- A quality improvement initiative should be monitored for impact.

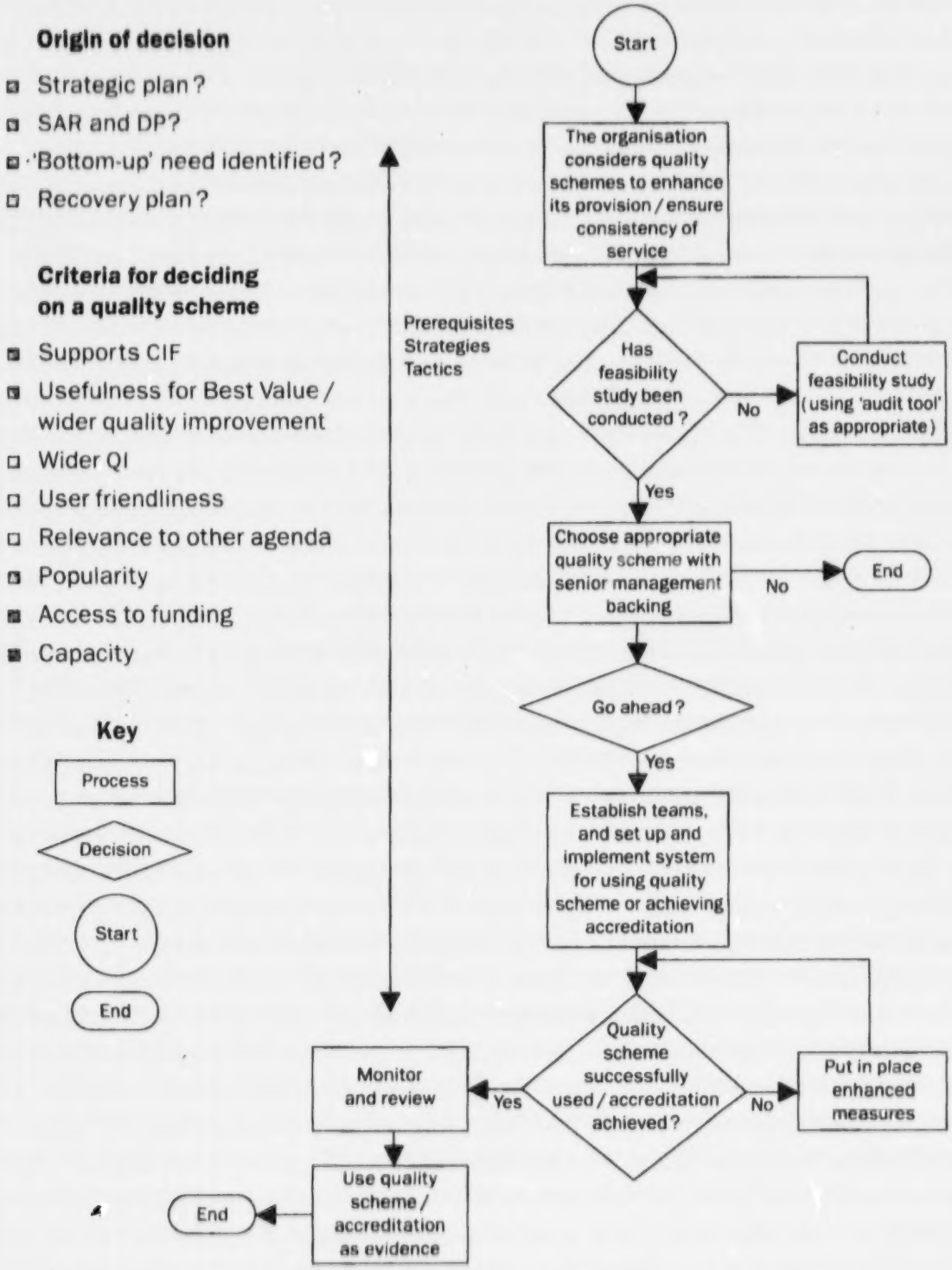
When staff themselves recognise the need for improvement, they are likely to be more productive than if there is a 'blame culture'. Positive cultural factors are vital, indicating readiness for change. In general, a 'bottom-up' approach (for example from a staff team that gets the organisation's backing) is likely to work better than a top-down one (for example if the organisation has to obey an edict from an outside agency). Stanton (2001, p19) reports that a quality initiative is much more likely to succeed in a learning organisation where there is 'mutual respect, honest feedback, good communication, shared values ... and the freedom to learn from mistakes'. He emphasises (p21) the importance of an overall strategy that is both a 'top-down and bottom-up process'.

The West Berkshire case study (see the 'Case studies' chapter) is clearly a 'bottom-up' response. The Hounslow case study stands out as an example of a holistic approach through a comprehensive framework.

The Cabinet Office (2001) offers good, practical examples of tactics and strategies for quality assurance and improvement.

To complete and briefly summarise this chapter, Figure 9 is a visual representation of the process of using a quality scheme.

Figure 9 Using a quality scheme and applying for accreditation



Case studies

The case studies in this chapter, contributed by the organisations themselves, show how ACL services have used quality schemes to enhance their work. There is much evidence that these organisations have 'got it right' in their decision-making, the principles underlying the decisions and their tactics for achieving the standards.

The case studies address the overlapping issues of quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement. Some approaches are more 'top-down' than others, but they all share these characteristics:

- involvement of colleagues at all levels
- good, clear, frequent communication
- strong direction.

Redbridge Institute of Adult Education

Redbridge Institute of Adult Education was established in the 1980s to integrate the diverse forms of adult provision across the London Borough of Redbridge. Services are secured through a scheme of delegation and financial management with the Institute's governing body.

The institute has 65 full-time and fractional staff and 232 part-time tutors. In 2000/01 the service had 8172 learners on 878 courses covering 13 areas of learning. The service is distributed across permanent accommodation under our own control (59%), school-based evening centres in borrowed accommodation (20%) and community associations and neighbourhood facilities (21%).

The institute holds the BSI ISO 9001 (August 1999) for ICT training services, was recognised as an Investor in People (January 2000) and has achieved Guidance Accreditation Board accreditation (March 2001) for its information and advice service.

Key issues

Quite different agendas have driven our use of each quality framework.

- *ISO 9001* we wanted to be recognised by employers as a local provider of quality IT training. We decided to go for ISO 9001 for our ICT training services because this would enable us to tender successfully for corporate work. Developing and maintaining the quality assurance procedures necessary for achieving the ISO standard would also help to achieve consistency and compliance across the service.
- *IiP* the excellent support available through our local TEC for service development, particularly business planning, played a significant role in our commitment to the IiP award.
- *Guidance Accreditation Board standards* the development of an information and advice service was a priority in our convergence action plan. The Guidance Accreditation Board standards gave us a very helpful framework that enabled us to set up and develop a completely new advice service in just eight months.

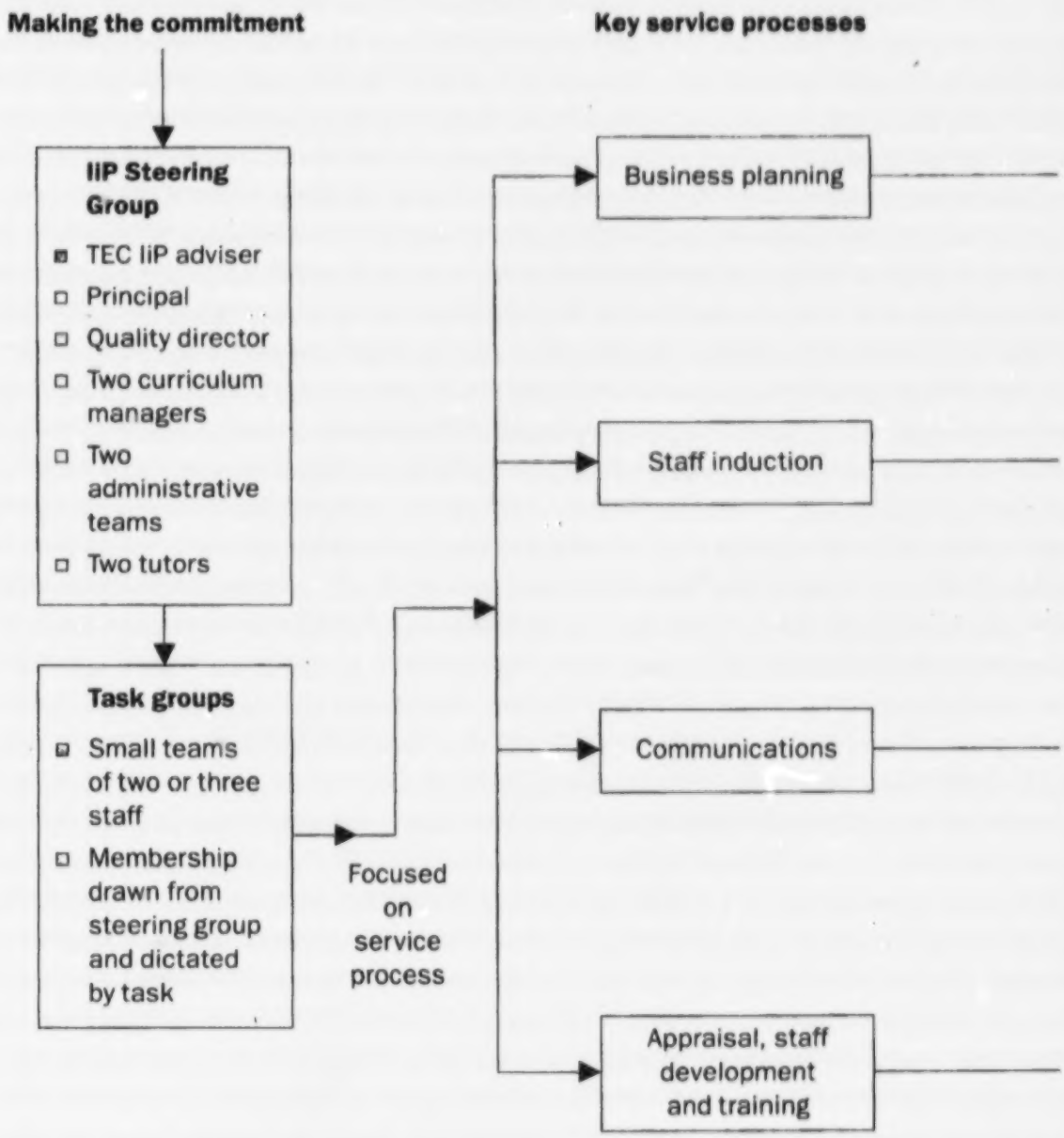
The process

We gained all three quality awards within the agreed timescale by:

- having the full support of our governing body and senior management team
- including the development required for successful accreditation in our business plan
- identifying a service 'champion' for each award
- setting up task groups with good staff representation and using their experience and expertise to identify shortfalls and strategies
- including teaching and non-teaching staff in the process
- acting quickly on task group recommendations
- making full use of the consultancy and support provided by each quality framework.

Our IiP assessor commended our innovative use of an IiP steering group.

Figure 10 How Redbridge Institute of Adult Education achieved Investors in People status



Outcomes for improvements

- Staff summaries of business plan distributed to all staff
- What's in it for:
  - managers
  - support staff
  - tutors?
- Standardisation induction pack with key documents
- Induction programme
- Induction checklist for managers
- Health and safety training
- Information available on disk
- Three staff letters annually
- One full staff meeting annually
- Staff bulletins as needed
- Staff organisation chart
- Revamped noticeboards
- Staff representation on project groups
- One 'free' course annually for all staff
- Revised appraisal scheme for full-time and fractional staff
- Comprehensive in-house staff training programme
- Tutor training needs identified through induction and classroom observation
- System of training evaluation introduced

Successful IiP assessment

Results and improvements

ISO 9001

ISO 9001 accreditation has brought real and significant benefits for our learners:

- learning materials are developed for every new course and tested by a designated tutor before being used with students
- compliance is rigorously monitored through a comprehensive internal audit cycle and an annual tutor observation cycle
- regular, well-attended team meetings keep staff up to date with new developments
- the ICT department was the first to introduce a student newsletter and an induction leaflet
- the department has been very successful in Local Initiative Fund and other bids, as well as securing contracts for providing training to local schools and Redbridge Borough employees.

Although the ISO 9001 award currently extends only to our ICT services, it has been of tremendous value to the whole service. For example:

- all service documents, including policies, guidelines and forms, are subject to 'document control' and are available to staff on the intranet
- there are templates for course descriptions, schemes of work, lesson plans, course evaluation, agendas, reports, minutes, posters and handouts, all of which have created a sense of corporate identity as well as ensuring consistency across curriculum areas
- a regular training programme for tutors in the use of templates has resulted in an improvement in tutor course management skills and in the quality of learning resources provided for students
- the ICT student induction leaflet has been used successfully as the model for developing a service-wide student induction strategy.

Investors in People

This award was key in helping us to develop more effective communication strategies. Following staff interviews, our IiP assessor noted that communications were 'unambiguous, regular and comprehensive' – a particular strength in a service which has very flexible family-friendly arrangements for part-time staff.

The great improvements made to staff induction have ensured that new part-time tutors are properly inducted in service policies and procedures before they work with learners.

Guidance Accreditation Board (GAB)

Personal or telephone callers unsure which is the right course for them can now drop into our Learner Advice Centre or book an appointment with one of our learning advisers. Since opening in February 2001, the Learner Advice Centre has exceeded its targets for providing information and advice. Most of our clients are women returners – a client group that traditionally has not been accessing information, advice and guidance services.

Through our statement of service (a requirement of the GAB standard) we have had to specify what a relatively small service like the Institute can offer realistically. The discussion and debate that this stimulated made us think through this issue very carefully indeed before distributing a leaflet for clients listing sources of information, advice and assistance. To meet the standard, we have also had to develop our own resources, for example on writing CVs and preparing for job interviews, and purchase a range of resources, including careers guidance software.

Tutors are beginning to take advantage of the new resources and are booking sessions in the centre for their classes. There have been gains for staff, too, with career development opportunities provided by the new learning adviser posts. The new post-holders and others covered by GAB are working towards their NVQ 3 Advice and Guidance or NVQ 2 Customer Services. The advice centre team is now an invaluable presence at all our marketing activities.

A number of other service-wide benefits are developing.

- We have added an advice element to our Development Fund bid, both at entry and at exit, to better support new learners.
- To address one of the weaknesses identified in our self-assessment report, a small project on progression is under way in one curriculum area: the curriculum manager, tutors and learning advisers are developing an information sheet on progression for students on complementary health courses. We hope to extend this resource to other areas of the curriculum.

Future plans

Using external quality frameworks has ensured that continuous improvement has been a service priority for Redbridge Institute, especially as assessment / reassessment dates loom. We are preparing for conversion from ISO 9001 to the new ISO 2000 and to the new Matrix standard for advice and guidance, both of which are prompting a major re-evaluation of our services.

We have involved a broad range of staff in preparing for these awards. This experience is helping us to respond to the new requirements for self-assessment and action planning, as well as providing us with evidence of a number of strengths.

Richmond Adult Community College

Richmond Adult Community College is based in Richmond-upon-Thames in Surrey. It has three main sites and 20 other centres to provide courses in the local community. It is one of 14 incorporated adult colleges in England and provides courses for adults in most areas of learning, with 40% of provision for leisure courses. Some funding is from the LEA. The college enrolled 25,500 learners in 2000/01, of whom 15,000 were LSC-funded and 799 of those were full-time.

The College was first awarded the Charter Mark in 1998.

Key issues

We saw the Charter Mark as a good way of assessing how the quality of our service measured up against the national benchmarks laid down by government.

We reapplied for the award in January 2002 and the assessor visited in March. It takes four months for the results to come through. It soon became clear that the process of putting the portfolio of evidence together was highlighting the weak areas in our provision. Our reapplication was a true driver for quality as, in our effort to cover each of the criteria, we tightened up procedures, updated policies and improved access to information by putting everything onto the college database.

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The process

We began the process in summer 2001, by planning who should be involved in the submission. We wanted a knowledgeable representative from every section of college who would be responsible for collecting evidence for each of the 10 areas of the award, and also a user representative – in this case, a member of the Student Association.

Two members of staff who had been involved in the 1998 submission attended a workshop in London to collect and discuss the new paperwork. We began to realise what a big job this was going to be. It is important that the workload is shared – the more people actively involved, the easier it becomes. You do, however, need one person to hold everything together; to set up the regular meetings; to remind people of their responsibilities and to collate the final submission. We had at least three people for each of the criteria and, in some cases, four or five. These subgroups could meet outside the main meetings to compare notes and see what else they needed to do. They then submitted their initial drafts with evidence and these were discussed in the main meetings.

Our final meetings were concerned with ensuring that all sections were in the house style and documentary evidence was present for all of the assessment criteria. These were put into plastic envelopes and numbered for easy access by the assessor. The college-wide documents which had been used for more than one area – prospectus, service standards and strategic plan, etc – were cross-referenced for all relevant areas. We then submitted the portfolios.

We prepared for inspection by the assessor by:

- raising awareness within college (a mailshot to all staff, articles in the college magazine and presentations in staff meetings)
- keeping students informed through notices in every classroom, information in registers, the college magazines and the Student Association
- allocating staff to check physical areas in college, such as whether noticeboards were up to date and hard copies of all policies were accessible, to ensure that we really were doing everything that we had put in our submission
- keeping in regular contact with the assessor to arrange her two-day visit to the college.

Results and improvements

Over the past three years we have been assessed for Investors in People and the Charter Mark. We have had a full college inspection and numerous financial and student record audits. Every aspect of the college has been checked and rechecked by external bodies. Preparations can be very stressful for staff and students alike. The ALI/OFSTED Inspection, for example, although very positive, has left a lasting impression on us. But, stressful as they are, they have all contributed to a much better quality provision for our staff and students. We are delighted that our hard work has resulted in achieving the Charter Mark again.

West Berkshire Council's Adult Education Information Service

West Berkshire is a small unitary authority. There are three staff in the Lifelong Learning Team and we run the Adult Education Information Service. We are also responsible for monitoring the provision of West Berkshire's ACL courses.

Our main provider is Newbury College. We also work in partnership with Reading Adult and Community College and Theale Green Community School to provide ACL courses in the community. These three organisations work in over 70 different venues.

Through our Community Education Fund we support schools and community groups to provide free, informal, introductory courses in:

- IT
- family learning
- environmental studies
- parenting skills
- other innovative and experimental programmes.

We have a good overview of ACL provision in West Berkshire and are able to provide a high-quality information and signposting service to people who live and work in the area. Although we are not able, or qualified, to offer advice or guidance on learning and work, we are able to refer our enquirers to the appropriate people and organisations.

Key issues

We decided to apply for the Guidance Council's B quality standard accreditation in information. We were encouraging our providers and partners to go for the standards themselves and felt that this was a good opportunity to show solidarity and work together to raise standards in West Berkshire.

The process

We found the accreditation process difficult at first. The training was confusing, as we were the only organisation in our group going for the B standards, and there were no previous models to follow. But because we trained with our partners, providers and other local colleges, we had plenty of opportunities to talk through issues and learn more about each other's services. We:

- organised a number of staff development sessions to:
  - document or review our policies and procedures
  - write a statement of service
  - share ideas for putting systems in place for logging enquiries, collecting feedback and making referrals
- collected records of equipment maintenance, appraisals and training
- audited our resources.

The Guidance Accreditation Board (GAB) helped us to do this. We attended their training courses and a consultant visited us. The evidence we produced was organised into a portfolio, which was sent to the GAB for assessment.

We received our accreditation in April 2001, with only one action point, and proudly placed our plaque in our reception area.

Results and improvements

- Our portfolio of evidence became an excellent training tool for a new staff member. Our resources were clearly labelled, listed and organised and our systems were in place, so she was able to answer enquiries from her first day.

- Putting the portfolio together brought us together as a team and helped us get to know more about the large organisation we work for. It also gave us networking opportunities to help us build relationships with our providers and partners, which has made it easier to refer clients to them.
- We have a much clearer idea of what we do and have been surprised at the number and range of enquiries we answer. It has raised our profile within West Berkshire Council.
- The documents we produced have been useful for other purposes. When West Berkshire relaunched its website, for example, the Lifelong Learning Team was clear about its role and able to put its Statement of Service on the website very quickly. We had already thought during the accreditation process about the website links we wished to include.
- We have improved our systems as we have become more experienced at using them and have listened to feedback from our clients. This has speeded up our responses and made us more professional.
- Keeping records of enquiries has created another resource that we can use. It has helped us work as a team, as now we share our work.
- Our knowledge and understanding of what is going on locally and what people want have increased.
- We have been encouraged to set up more displays in our reception areas and to make sure that there are stocks of directories and prospectuses at pick-up points. This gives Council staff and customers more opportunities to find out what courses are available.
- Being accredited means that we receive some financial support from our local information, advice and guidance partnership. We have achieved our target of supporting other organisations in West Berkshire to gain accreditation, by contributing to networking events and by offering models of systems. It has added to our workload, but the people who live and work in West Berkshire are getting a better service. Being able to access more learning opportunities will hopefully make a difference to people's lives.

Future plans

Our re-accreditation will involve a site visit from our assessor. We will be preparing for that soon.

West Berkshire Council is spearheading the way in which local government support services are funded and run. It has gone into partnership with Amey, a private company that will be running some aspects of the Council's personnel, IT, property, front-of-house, street-care and administrative functions. They hope that all enquiries to the Council will be dealt with at a 'one-stop shop'. Amey is committed to quality systems. Will it become accredited to the new Matrix standard? It will be interesting to see how things develop.

London Borough of Hounslow Adult and Community Education Service

Hounslow is an outer London Borough stretching along the A4/M4 corridor between Heathrow Airport and Hammersmith. It has an adult population of around 120,000, 33% of whom are from an ethnic minority background. There are good employment opportunities, but many local people cannot access these because of poor basic skills, so most of the benefits go to outsiders.

The Adult and Community Education Service offers adult education and training, community sports and community lettings in schools. The adult education arm of the service is delivered directly and has a wide programme of part-time courses taught by part-time tutors. It has ALP and FE contracts from the LSC and various other regeneration projects. It attracts approximately 14,500 enrolments a year. Adult education is managed through seven curricular areas and delivered through eight centres based in secondary schools. It also uses a large number of outreach points, including primary schools and community centres, to widen participation and extend daytime provision. The service has excellent partnerships with other Council departments, the voluntary sector and the local college.

The service has IiP accreditation, has had the Basic Skills Agency Quality kitemark for a number of years, and successfully underwent a Best Value Review in 2000–1.

Key issues

In the late 1990s a number of factors encouraged the service to develop its own quality framework, including:

- the development of various quality tools in the mid-1990s, including student surveys and a tutor observation procedure
- work done nationally by HOLEX, which encouraged thinking about self-assessment, preparation for inspection and the setting up of a quality board
- the principal of the service was a part-time Adult OFSTED inspector (now an associate ALI inspector)
- the appointment of a deputy who had a college background and experience of self-assessment and review inspection and who was also an education consultant
- disparate practice across the service, which needed pulling together and improving.

In 2000 it became clear that the service would be one of the first in Hounslow to go through a Best Value Review (it was thought that this would help in the transition to the LSC). It became obvious that an internally constructed quality framework would be very useful if it could also contain the systems for carrying out the Review. This would ensure minimal duplication and give the service a strong influence on the review process.

The process

We had been thinking about formalising the framework for some time, but there always seemed to be more pressing deadlines. Prompted by what was seen as the possible threat of Best Value, we started to collate our quality policies and all the various quality tools that we had already devised. The Best Value Review covered all service activities and this meant that we had to rise to the challenge of making the framework fit all that we did. We wanted a framework that would capture the information required by any audit, inspection or review (see Figure 11).

A draft version was published internally in summer 2000. Senior managers identified omissions and redrafted the framework. It was then cascaded to other permanent staff and tutors, with a strong message that quality is everyone's responsibility. It was also presented to the Council's Best Value Board, who agreed that it should be used as the basis for the Review.

During the next six months we carried out our first annual self-assessment and fed this and other information into the Review. The framework was refined as we built on our experience.

Results and improvements

- There are agreed systems for developing and improving self-assessment and other quality activities.
- We have established a continuous quality process, which feeds into an annual self-assessment cycle (see Figure 12).
- By having a quality framework that covers all the work of the service – not just adult education – we have improved the external image of the wider service and the sense of coherence within it.
- The framework is an essential tool for quality improvement and staff development.
- The Best Value process was still tough, but easier because it incorporated our systems.
- We were able to give the published quality framework to the LSC and others who have an interest in the quality of what we do.
- We were able to have a practice at self-assessment before we had to do it for the LSC.

Future plans

We are now improving the parts of our practice that we knew were weak, for example our observation form and procedures. We are also adapting our self-assessment forms to take account of both the LSC guidelines and the experience of the ALI pilot inspections of ACL.

It remains a challenge to keep the framework up to date and to make sure that all staff, including our 350-plus part-time tutors, embrace its principles and practice.

Finally, we all have to remember that the existence of a published framework does not in itself ensure quality improvement. It should help the process, but in the end it has to be implemented consistently and whatever is revealed has to be acted upon so that the quality improvement process is continuous.

Figure 11 Quality framework: external demands and influences

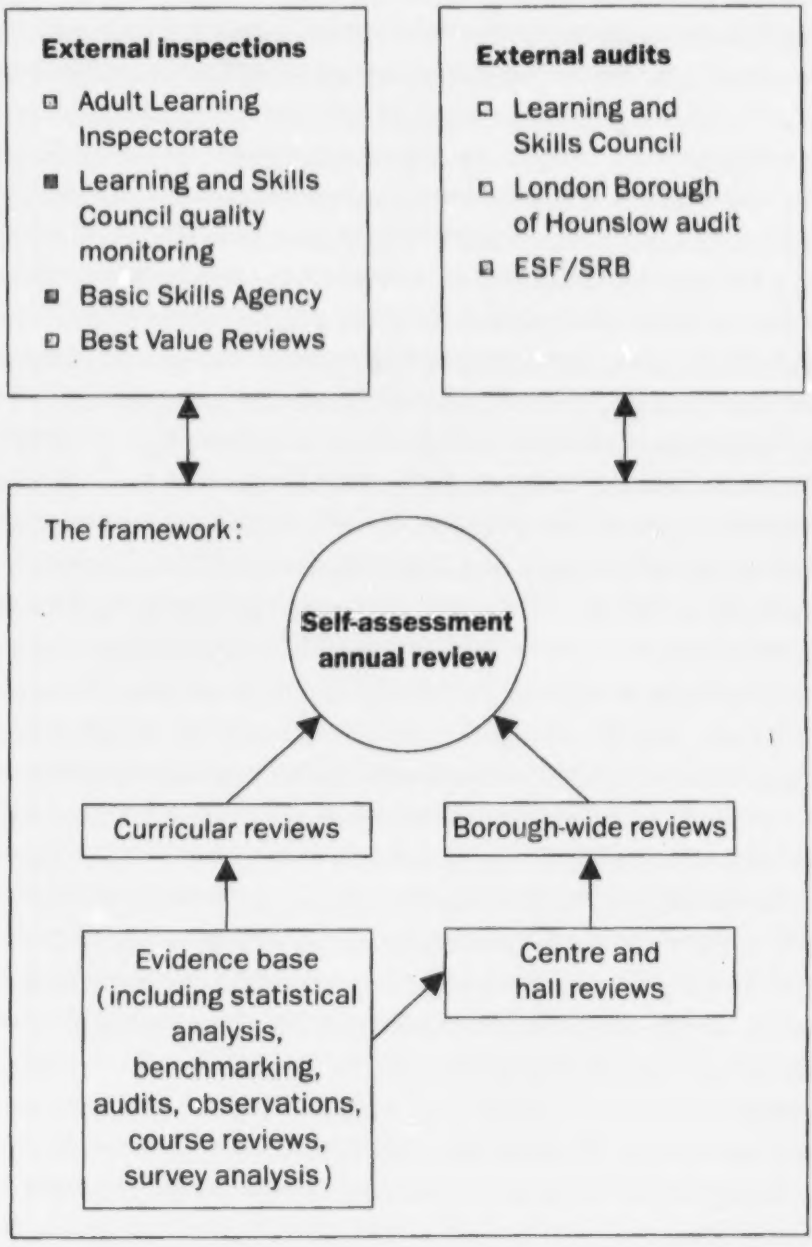
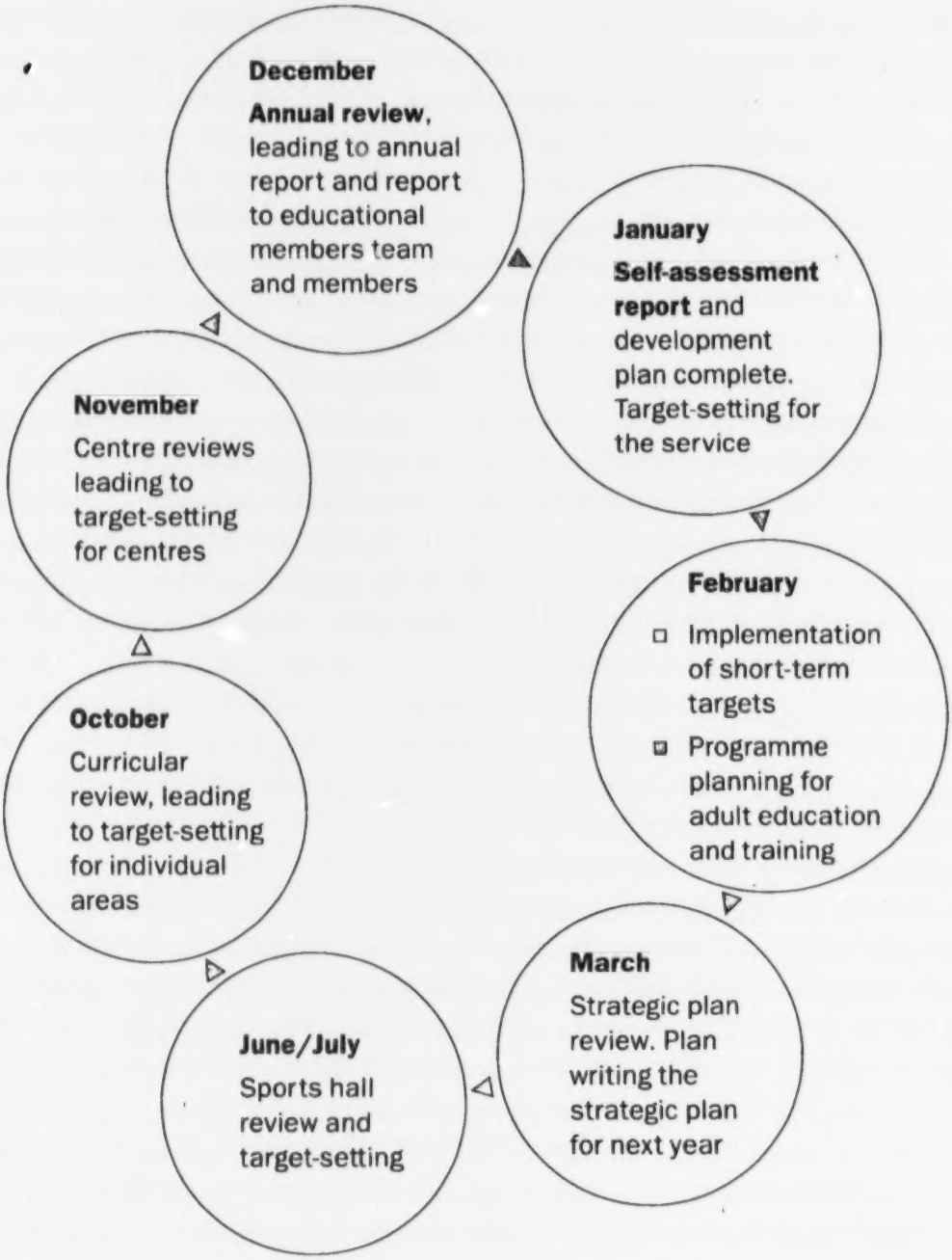


Figure 12 Review cycle


December
Annual review, leading to annual report and report to educational members team and members
January
Self-assessment report and development plan complete. Target-setting for the service
February
Implementation of short-term targets
Programme planning for adult education and training
March
Strategic plan review. Plan writing the strategic plan for next year
June/July
Sports hall review and target-setting
October
Curricular review, leading to target-setting for individual areas
November
Centre reviews leading to target-setting for centres

Oxfordshire County Council ACL Service

Oxfordshire County Council ACL Service provides learning opportunities through 28 community education centres. In 2000/01 we ran over 3000 programmes, with over 22,000 learners participating in 240 venues – from first rung up to level 2, with some gap-filling at level 3. The service operates across the whole county, is the largest single provider of adult learning opportunities and plays a major role in local planning for lifelong learning.

Three adult and community learning officers (ACLOs) share supervision of the service with the head of ACL. Each ACLO supervises one of three geographical areas, as well as having county-wide responsibilities. Working with this central management team is a group of county-wide specialist officers and service coordinators:

- a head of basic skills
- a development officer for local learning centres
- an outreach coordinator
- a New Start adult guidance coordinator
- a professional development coordinator
- 13 full-time area heads and six full-time equivalent centre heads; these staff also have curriculum or equality monitoring and development roles.

The process

In 2000 we decided that, with so many staff involved in monitoring and developing quality in different centres and services, we needed standards of competence for teaching and learning that would enable us to take a common approach.

We developed standards of competence for all tutors. These were based on the draft Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards, the NVQ Training and Development performance criteria and the City and Guilds Further and Adult Education Teachers' Certificate 7307 programmes. Each standard is expressed as a competence, with a minimum standard and recommended sources of evidence (see Figure 8).

We developed a set of independent learning materials, *Adult learning matters*, to support tutors working towards the standards. There are nine books for each of the nine areas of competence, two supporting language tutors and arts and crafts tutors, and one for mentors.

The standards and learning materials were launched at county staff meetings, with training sessions on how to use them. All centres have copies. There was a public launch in September 2001, with training workshops.

The standards of competence have been:

- integrated with our observation of teaching and learning systems
- incorporated into our in-house inspection and quality framework
- built into tutor training programmes
- launched as an in-house accreditation of prior learning scheme for tutors to gain access to other teaching qualifications.

Results and improvements

We have used the standards to:

- support recruitment and selection of tutors
- assist tutors and managers in identifying their training needs
- identify good practice and areas for development in the observation of teaching and learning
- support managers in giving clear and specific feedback to tutors following observation
- set baseline standards for programme plans, session plans and tutor records
- support staff training and development.

Our standards of competence are a quality indicator that will support our self-assessment reporting and development planning and give direction to managers in judging quality. In this way we:

- are strengthening our leadership and management – CIF key question 7, area 3
- have the opportunity to develop a common approach to monitoring quality and grading provision
- have a basis on which to secure the quality of education and training in the service – CIF key questions 2–6, area 2.

Tutors unable to take up the City and Guilds 7307 programmes can now be accredited through our in-house scheme. We have increased access to professional development for our tutors.

The independent learning materials *Adult learning matters* have been widely used by tutors on the 7307 programmes. They are the books most frequently borrowed from our learning centre. Tutors are also accessing them in their local centres to support their own ongoing development.

Future plans

We intend to:

- embed these standards of competence in our observation of teaching and learning system and quality framework – it is a challenge in a service with so many local centres to achieve consistently high quality
- use the standards to support our moderation of grades for the self-assessment reports
- raise tutors' awareness of the standards
- develop independent learning materials for health and fitness tutors.

Conclusion

The case studies show that hard work and commitment are required in developing and using quality schemes. However, they also confirm the energy and focus that exist in the ACL sector and that a high degree of quality improvement results if such schemes are used. The quality schemes are a useful supplement to the new quality regime represented by self-assessment and development planning, performance review, the CIF and the quadrennial ALI inspection cycle.

Appendix Audit tool – taking stock

Use this audit tool to help you choose between quality schemes by conducting a feasibility study. For a downloadable copy, visit: www.qualityACL.org.uk

Key

A = We are very confident about this; we have evidence that work is established and that staff and students understand their roles and responsibilities

B = We haven't done much on this yet, but we know what we need to do and how to go about it

C = We still need to do a lot of work on this area

	A	B	C
Quality Assurance			
Our Quality Assurance arrangements are systematic and effective in identifying and addressing weaknesses and areas where improvement is needed			
All staff understand and are fully involved in our QA arrangements			
Self-assessment			
Through self-assessment we evaluate the quality of all aspects of our provision			
Our self-assessment processes are rigorous and we have adopted a constructively self-critical approach			
All staff are encouraged to review their own performance and identify areas for improvement			
Learners are involved in the self-assessment process			
Self-assessment processes and reporting are integral to strategic and operational planning processes			

	A	B	C
Equality of opportunity			
Equality of opportunity is embedded and 'mainstreamed' in every aspect of our organisation and at every level – strategy, policy, identifying needs, action planning, support, curriculum development, teaching and learning, staffing and staff development, monitoring and review			
Specifically:			
We have a stated policy and strategy for ensuring and promoting equality of opportunity and arrangements are in place to monitor the implementation and impact of these			
We have effective measures in place to eliminate oppressive behaviour, including all forms of harassment			
We are responding to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act 2002 (to be Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)			
Making judgements			
Judgements in the SAR are made against the quality statements in the CIF			
Judgements in the SAR are based on sufficient evidence which has been and can be sampled			
We have graded aspects of our provision using the inspectorate grading scales and descriptors			

	A	B	C
Evidence			
Our system for the observation of teaching and learning takes account of the CIF quality criteria and incorporates a focus on the needs, learning, progress and achievement of individual learners			
Our system for the observation of teaching and learning provides a sufficiently large and diverse evidence base to inform grading of all areas of learning that we offer			
Management information and performance data are collected, analysed and used effectively to inform judgements about the quality of provision, inform decision-making and bring about improvement			
Evidence is collected and scrutinised throughout the cycle as part of ongoing quality assurance and monitoring of progress against the Development Plan			
We have systems in place for gathering feedback from learners and other stakeholders, which contribute to the evidence base on which self-assessment judgements are based			

	A	B	C
Quality of teaching and learning			
We know the extent to which learners are completing their programmes and achieving planned learning outcomes and learning objectives			
Initial, formative and summative assessment processes are comprehensive, fair, appropriate and support learning			
Sufficient attention is paid to individual learning needs and there are systems and methods for recording this			
In delivering our provision a sufficiently wide range of teaching and learning methods is used to recognise and take account of diversity and to support equality of opportunity			
Learners have equality of access to a range of support services in relation to information, advice and guidance, appropriate and effective individual learning support and personal support			
Learners have been provided with a statement of their learning entitlement and understand their responsibilities as learners			
The portfolio of provision is designed to provide or enable access to progression opportunities			
Learning always takes place with due regard to health and safety considerations			
Accommodation in which learning takes place is always fit for purpose and of an appropriate standard			
We have a strategy in place to meet the new requirements of Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995			

	A	B	C
Planning for quality improvement			
Through systematic and regular management review we monitor the process of continuous improvement			
We have a comprehensive and effective system for listening to the views of our learners (past, current, potential), our community and other 'stakeholders'			
We act on the feedback we receive from customers and learners to bring about specific improvements			
We have effective systems in place to monitor and address complaints			
We have set realistic but challenging targets in relation eg to retention, achievement, completion of courses and programmes and progression to further learning or employment			
Our Development Plan includes targets, milestones and proposed timescales			
Our Development Plan sets out how we will address the issues we identified, build on strengths and how we aim to achieve excellence			
Our staff, partners and stakeholders are aware of the priorities in our Development Plan			
We have arrangements in place systematically to monitor the implementation of the Development Plan, to enable us to provide reports on our progress during the year and update the plan in liaison with the Local LSC			

	A	B	C
Curriculum and staff training and professional development			
Within our organisational structure individuals have been identified who are responsible for, and are supported in providing, curriculum leadership and development			
We have an up-to-date plan for the professional development and training of all staff			
All staff understand what they are required to do to help us achieve the objectives within the Development Plan			
Performance management, staff appraisal and review are effective in improving the quality of provision			
We identify and make effective arrangements to share good practice			
Health and safety			
We have arrangements in place to ensure the health and safety of all employees, volunteers and users of our service, which are monitored regularly			
Financial and other resources			
'Best Value' principles of comparison, challenge, consultation and competition are applied in securing resources and services			
We can demonstrate that efficient and effective use is made of resources			
We are able to demonstrate financial probity and value for money			
Quality schemes			
We are using relevant quality schemes			
We have the capacity to consider quality schemes to enhance our service			
Partnerships			
Our partners operate the same processes and procedures as us and to the same standards as us or are working towards this			

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Note

Back-up material for this booklet and others in this series can be found at: www.qualityACL.org.uk

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Useful websites

General

www.qualityACL.org.uk

www.lsc.gov.uk

www.niace.org.uk

www.rqa.org.uk

www.LSDA.org.uk

www.servicefirst.gov.uk

Basic Skills Quality Mark

www.basic-skills.co.uk / programmes / qualitymark_home_overview.asp

Charter Mark

www.chartermark.gov.uk

Excellence Model

www.quality-foundation.co.uk

Guidance Council Matrix

www.guidancecouncil.com

Investors in People

www.iipuk.co.uk

ISO 9000

www.bsi.org.uk

Learning PROBE

www.rqa.org.uk (Benchmarking and Information strand)

PQASSO

www.ces-vol.org.uk/pqasso.htm

adult and community learning
quality support programme

Adult and community learning (ACL) services have made considerable progress in addressing the quality agenda established by the Learning and Skills Act 2000. They have produced their first self-assessment reports and development plans under the new regime, and many have used other quality schemes in addition to the OFSTED/ALI Common Inspection Framework (CIF) to enhance quality control, assurance and improvement.

This publication examines ACL and quality schemes. It notes the difficulties faced by LEA ACL services in delivering consistent quality, reviewing how quality improvement has been supported and the messages from pilot ACL inspections by the Adult Learning Inspectorate. It describes different quality schemes, considering their advantages and disadvantages, and reviews them in relation to notional weaknesses and the CIF. Case studies provide practical and accessible examples of how quality schemes can improve ACL services.

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